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ABSTRACT

This study investigated parents' knowledge of their child's emergent literacy development by administering parent questionnaires that examined parents' beliefs of literacy learning and the early writing and reading experiences of preschool children in their home. A total of 115 questionnaires were administered to parents with children enrolled in a preschool in the Red Band area of New Jersey, and a total of 24 usable questionnaires were returned. Responses were tallied and converted to percentages for analysis. Results indicated that the parents have considerable knowledge regarding their child's emergent literacy development. (Contains 32 references and 2 tables of data. Appendixes contain the parent questionnaire and additional data.) (Author/RS)

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ED 417 389

Parents' Knowledge of Emergent Literacy

By

Ellen Meehan

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Abstract

This study investigated parents' knowledge of their child's emergent literacy development by administering parent questionnaires that examined parents' beliefs of literacy learning and the early writing and reading experiences of preschool children in their home. 115 questionnaires were administered to parents with children enrolled in a preschool in the Red Band area of New Jersey. 24 questionnaires were used in the study. Responses from questionnaires were tallied and converted to percentages for analysis. The results indicated that the parents have considerable knowledge regarding their child's emergent literacy development.

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Many people would agree that parents are their child's first teacher and that they affect many aspects of their child's development. Studies have shown that literacy learning is one of these developments in which parents play an integral role (Taylor, 1983; Durkin,1966).

Research findings about literacy in early childhood have challenged the deep-rooted practices in reading readiness that have been around since the 1950s. It was believed that "one prepared for literacy by acquiring a set of prescribed skills" (Morrow, 1989, p.10) and that children knew little about literacy before entering school. Parent's involvement and the home environment were not considered significant factors in a child's literacy development.

Based on Gesell's (1925) study, maturation was the most important factor in learning to read and; support from Morphett and Washburne's (1931) study, children were not considered to be ready to begin reading instruction until six years of age (both studies cited in Morrow, 1989). Although many parents read to their young children, literacy development was perceived as the role of early elementary schooling.

Research in cognitive development, language acquisition, early readers, and what children learn about books, print, and

writing before entering school has changed attitudes and ideas about early childhood literacy development (Morrow,1989).

One of the outgrowths of these changes is a current theory of early childhood literacy known as Emergent Literacy. This perspective implies that development occurs from within the child, that it happens over time, that some fundamental abilities for making sense of the world must already exist within the child, and that the ability to read and write will emerge when conditions are right (Burns, Roe and Ross, 1992). Literacy learning occurs naturally in the home and community as children see print and understand its function in their environment (Taylor, 1983).

Common denominators found in studies of early readers include parents who read frequently to their child (Stoebel and Evans, 1988), interacted directly with their child around print (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Thomas, 1985), and were surrounded by a literate rich environment with the parents modeling reading (Taylor, 1983).

Research also indicates that children who are frequently read to experience higher achievements than children to whom are not read. (Teale, 1981).

It is apparently never too early to begin reading to children. In Lamme and Packer's (1996) study it was revealed that infants actually do attend to books and display affective behaviors such as being more relaxed, grinning, and hugging while their parents are reading to them.

In light of this, parents can indeed play a significant role in their child's literacy development.

Many parents are aware that they should read to their children, however, many are also not aware of the benefits or activities that help their child during literacy development (Silvern, 1985).

As a result of this, many articles have been written with the intention to educate parents about emergent literacy and to provide parents with suggestions on how to support their child's literacy development (Barkley, Benelli, and Curtis. 1995; Wahl, 1988; Kupetz and Green, 1997).

If "learning to read" is considered by parents, teachers and the general public to be the most important educational objective for children" (Silvern, 1985, p.44) and; given the importance of parents involvement in the reading process, it is important to determine parent's knowledge of their child's literacy development.

Much of today's literature on early literacy development supports an emergent literacy perspective. A child's early years, which has been documented as a period of substantial literacy development, are spent with a parent or caregiver. Therefore, the question of whether or not parents have an understanding of their child's emergent literacy development warrants investigation. If parents are apprised of the general information available now on early literacy development they may be better equipped to help their child during this stage of development.

If parents are shown to have limited knowledge regarding their child's emergent literacy development, it would then warrant further investigation on the part of researchers, educators, and the media to find ways to effectively disseminate the extensive body of knowledge regarding emergent literacy, which may provide a more equal opportunity from which all children can benefit.

Hypothesis

To provide evidence in this area, the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that parents would have limited knowledge of their child's emergent literacy development.

Procedure

Participants

Twenty-four parents whose children, 11 boys and 13 girls, were enrolled in a preschool in the Red Bank area of New Jersey participated in the study. Twenty-three mothers and one father completed the questionnaires. Twenty of the participants were college graduates or above and four were high school graduates.

Method

A parent questionnaire was compiled to learn more about parents' beliefs of literacy learning and the early writing and reading experiences of preschool children and to see if they follow an emergent literacy perspective. The questions were a compilation from questionnaires used in similar studies focusing on emergent literacy perspectives (Anderson, 94; Smith and Dixon, 95).

The questionnaire was devised to investigate several aspects of early literacy development in the home environment. They included daily literacy events, reading episodes, literacy artifacts, literacy instruction, and general literacy beliefs.

115 questionnaires were sent home with the children in the preschool. A letter was attached to the questionnaire instructing the parents to complete and sign the questionnaire. Parents were also instructed to return the questionnaire to the

envelopes labeled "Survey Responses" that were posted throughout the preschool. Parents were made aware that participation was voluntary and that all names would remain anonymous. 26 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 23%. Two of the questionnaires were not completed and signed, therefore 24 questionnaires were reported in this study.

Results

Raw scores (appendix B) from the questionnaires were converted to percentages for analyzing and reporting purposes. Responses to each question have been individually analyzed below.

The first group of questions focused on literacy events that take place during everyday living. Parents were asked to check one of the following responses: never, seldom, occasionally, weekly, and daily.

1. Do you read to your child?

   92% read to their child daily and 8% read to their child occasionally.

2. Does your child ask to be read to?

   83% reported that their child asks to be read to daily and 17% reported that their child asks to be read to occasionally.

3. Does your child try to read to you?

   50% reported that their child tries to read to them occasionally, 33% reported weekly, 13% reported daily, and 4% reported seldom.

4. Does your child look through books and other printed material?

   67% reported that their child looks through books and other printed material daily, 25% reported weekly, 4% reported occasionally, and 4% reported seldom.

5. Does your child pretend to read storybooks?

   42% reported that their child read storybooks weekly, 37% reported daily, 13% reported occasionally, and 8% reported seldom.

6. Do you visit the public library with your child?

   42% visit the library with their child weekly, 37% occasionally, 17% seldom, and 4% never.

7. Does your child listen to books on tape?

   50% reported that their child listens to books on tape occasionally, 25% reported seldom, 21% reported never, and 4% reported weekly.

8. Does your child try to tell or write stories?

   38% reported that their child tells or writes stories, 33% reported occasionally, 25% reported daily, and 4% reported seldom.

9. Do you and your child discuss books that you have read together?

38% reported discussing books read together daily, 33% reported weekly, 25% reported occasionally, and 4% reported seldom.

10. Does your child help to write letters/cards?

71% reported that their child helped to write letters/cards occasionally, 17% reported weekly, 8% reported seldom, and 4% reported never.

11. Does your child help open mail?

42% reported that their child helps open the mail occasionally, 17% reported weekly, 12% reported daily, and 12% reported never.

12. Do you read books, magazines, newspapers at home?

83% read books, magazines, and newspapers at home daily, 13% weekly, and 4% occasionally.

13. Does your child observe or participate making shopping lists?

29% responded that their child never participates making shopping lists, 25% responded occasionally, 25% responded weekly, 17% responded seldom, and 4% responded daily.

14. Does your child observe/participate writing messages/notes for family members?

62.5% reported that their child observes/participates writing messages/notes for family members occasionally, 12.5% reported never, 12.5% reported seldom, and 12.5% reported weekly.

15. Does your child observe/participate following written directions?

58% reported that their child observes/participates following written directions occasionally, 25% reported weekly, 13% responded never, and 4% responded seldom.

16. Does your child observe/participate using the TV Guide?

50% reported that their child never observes/participates using the TV Guide, 33% responded occasionally, and 17% responded seldom.

17. Do you receive or write letters?

67% receive or write letters occasionally, 17% weekly, 12% seldom, and 4% daily.

18. Does your child recognize or ask for help to read store signs or read traffic signs?

42% responded that their child recognizes or asks for help to read store signs or read traffic signs weekly, 38% reported occasionally, 12% reported daily, 4% reported seldom, and 4% reported never.

19.Does your child write or ask help to write letters/words?

42% responded that their child writes or asks help to write letters/words daily, 29% responded weekly, and 21% responded occasionally, 4% responded seldom, and 4% responded never.

The second set of questions focused on reading episodes that take place with the parent and child. The parents were instructed to check one of the following responses: never, seldom, occasionally, and frequently.

20.I stop reading and point out objects for the child to identify in the pictures.

71% stop reading and point out objects for the child to identify in the pictures frequently, 29% occasionally.

21.I stop reading and point out letters in the print.

42% stop reading and point out letters in the print frequently, 38% occasionally, 12% seldom, and 8% never.

22.I stop reading and point out pictures that illustrate what was told in the story.

63% stop reading and point out pictures that illustrate what was told in the story frequently, 33% occasionally, 4% seldom.

23.I stop reading and ask what will happen next.

42% stop reading and ask what will happen next occasionally, 29% seldom, 25% frequently, and 4% seldom.

24.I read the entire story as the child listens without many interruptions.

50% read the entire story as the child listens without many interruptions seldom, 38% occasionally, 8% never, 4% daily.

25.I reread a story or book previously read to my child.

75% reread a story or book previously read to my child frequently, 21% occasionally, 4% seldom.

26.I encourage my child to read with me when the book uses repeated phrases or familiar rhymes.

54% encourage their child to read with them when the book uses repeated phrases or familiar rhymes frequently, 38% occasionally, and 8% never.

27.My child sits beside me so he/she can see the book.

100% sit the child beside them so he/she can see the book frequently.

28.My child sits across from me so he/she can hear the story.

71% never sit their child across from them when reading a story, 25% seldom, and 4% occasionally.

29.My child selects the book(s) to be read.

96% allow the child to select the book(s) to be read frequently, 4% occasionally.

30.I select the book(s) to be read.

50% select the book(s) to be read occasionally, 33% seldom, 13% frequently, and 4% never.

31.My child holds the book and turns the pages.

58% allow the child to hold the book and turn the pages occasionally, 33% seldom, 4.1% never, and 4.1% frequently.

32.I hold the book and turn the pages.

75% hold the book and turn the pages frequently, 21% occasionally, and 4% seldom.

33. The third set of questions, focused on literacy artifacts that are made available to the child at anytime in the home. Table I below illustrates the results of the literacy artifacts analysis.

Table I: Literacy Artifacts Provided by Parents

Literacy Artifacts	Percentage of parents	Literacy Artifacts	Percentage of parents
Paper	100%	Newspaper	58%
Pencil	96%	Typewriter	21%
Marker	96%	Playgym	92%
Pen	83%	Computer	86%
Children's books	100%	Magnetic/block letters	63%
Magazine	79%	Comics	8%
Chalk & Board	79%	Stuffed animals	100%
Musical instrument	92%	Dictionary	50%
Crayons	100%	Flachcards	58%

34. The fourth set of questions focused on literacy instruction offered to the child by the parent. The parents were asked to

check all the statements in which this type of help was offered. Table II illustrates the results of each literacy instruction.

Table II: Literacy Instruction Provided by Parents

Literacy Instruction	Percentage of parents
Taught child the ABC	75%
Prepared a library corner in child's room	79%
Placed written labels on objects around the house	13%
Enforced rules about selecting/limiting TV viewing	75%
Purchased or borrowed books/magazines	100%
Provided and area for drawing/writing	92%
Helped child sound out words	79%
Taught child the names of some letters	96%
Taught child the sound of some letters	
Used flashcards or workbooks to teach names or sounds	54%
Correct child's attempts at spelling	33%
Praise child's efforts regardless of how a word is spelled	75%
None of the above	0%

35. The fifth set of questions focused on parents' beliefs of their role in their child's literacy development. Three different roles were given to which the parents were asked to select the one that best describes their beliefs.

0% responded - I don't worry about it. I believe my child will learn to read when she/he gets to school. So, I will simply read to her/him and not try to teach them to read.

46% responded - I believe its best to take an active role, and set aside time to teach children about their names and sounds, read to them, and purchase school-type workbooks.

54% responded - I believe my child will learn to read when she/he gets to school. However, I want to help them become aware of written language without directly teaching her/him. I will, therefore, read to them, encourage them to use print by providing them with paper and writing instruments.

The last set of questions focuses on parents' beliefs of how reading to children and providing writing experiences affects literacy.

36. I believe that reading to children

100% - will help them to read

0% - is not likely to help them to learn to read

37. I believe children's early writing experiences

100% - will help them to read

0% - is not likely to help them to learn to read

Conclusions

The results of this study seem to indicate that the parents in this study do have some beliefs about early literacy learning that follow an emergent literacy perspective. The amount and type of literacy activities that took place in each of the homes suggests this.

For example, the first set of questions, which centered on literacy interactions that happen during the course of everyday

living, revealed that the parents and children were interacting in some form of literacy activity on a daily basis. Ninety-two percent of the parents (22 out of 24) read to their child daily. Also, eighty-three percent of the parents (20 out of 24) read for information or pleasure on a daily basis providing a positive role model for their child to emulate. Both reading to a child and modeling positive reading behavior have been documented as important aspects of a child's emerging literacy.

Writing experiences during the course of everyday living seemed primarily to take place occasionally. Seventy-one percent reported having their child help write thank you notes and cards occasionally. Sixty-two percent report that their child helped writing family messages/notes occasionally. Sixty-seven percent reported receiving or writing letters occasionally. These results seem to suggest that the parents provided some authentic writing experiences and may be aware of the connection between writing and reading.

The second set of questions focusing on interactions that take place during a reading episode suggest that most of the parents interacted with their child occasionally and frequently during a reading episode.

Many of the parents employed the technique of scaffolding by pointing out illustrations to increase understanding of the story

being read. Seventy-one percent of the parents reported stopping frequently while reading to point out objects in the pictures for the child to identify. Sixty-three percent and thirty-three percent of the parents reported stopping frequently and occasionally, respectively, while reading to point out pictures that would illustrate what was told in the story.

All twenty-four parents responded that they frequently allowed their child to sit beside them while reading. Also, the majority of the parents, ninety-six percent, reported that they frequently allowed their child to select the books to be read. Fifty-four percent of the parents responded that they frequently encouraged their child to read with them when the story used repeated phrases or familiar rhymes. These results suggest that the parents in this study understood the importance of involving the child in the reading episode.

The third set of questions investigated the literacy artifacts made available to the child, see Table I. Three of the eighteen items listed were distracters. They included musical instruments, playgym, and stuffed animals. All of the items listed received a response of sixty percent or higher, except for typewriter, comics, dictionary, and flashcards. These results suggest that the majority of the parents provided most of the literacy artifacts for their child.

The fourth set of questions investigated literacy instruction offered by the parent, see Table II. The results of this section seem to indicate that the parents in this study believe in taking an active role in teaching their child about certain literacy concepts.

For example, ninety-six percent of the parents taught their child the sounds of words, ninety-two percent of the parents taught their child the sounds of some letters, and seventy-five percent taught the alphabet.

Also, 100 percent of the parents bought or borrowed books for their child and seventy-nine percent prepared a library corner in their child's room. However, only thirteen percent placed labels on objects around the house.

Thirty-three percent of the parents reported that they corrected their child's attempt at spelling.

The fifth set of questions examined parents' beliefs about their role in their child's literacy development.

Forty-six percent of the parents believe in a active role in their child's literacy development, setting time aside to teach some of the early skills of reading using commercial products such as dot to dot, and color by number workbooks.

Fifty-four percent of the parents believe in an indirect approach by reading to their child and by encouraging writing by

providing writing materials, however, this contradicts the results of the literacy instruction section, in which some literacy instruction was provided by the majority of the parents.

Parents were also asked if reading to children and early writing experiences would help children to read. All of the parents responded that reading to children and writing experiences would help children to read.

The results of this study permit rejection of the hypothesis that parents in this study would have a limited knowledge of their child's emergent literacy development. The parents seemed to have considerable knowledge about emergent literacy practices. The parents demonstrated this knowledge by engaging with their child in many of the literacy activities presented in the study.

In order to more fully understand and extend the body of information about early literacy development and parents' role in their child's literacy development, research that investigates how and where parents obtain and develop their knowledge of early literacy development would be a valuable endeavor.

EMERGENT LITERACY: RELATED RESEARCH

Today, many concepts and practices in early childhood literacy development are supported by the contemporary theory known as emergent literacy. The concept of emergent literacy made advances through the outgrowth of research in such areas as cognitive development, language development, early readers, and the home environment. The theoretical framework surrounding the current study is based on research in these areas that support an emergent literacy perspective.

A brief overview of the concepts that support emergent literacy will help to more clearly define this theory. Burns, Roe and Ross (1992) describe Teale and Sulzby's (1992) view of emergent literacy as a "developing awareness of the interrelatedness of oral and written language by an individual during their early childhood years," (page 42). This perspective implies that literacy learning occurs from within the child and develops gradually over time and that the child's knowledge of reading and writing develops concurrently.

An emergent literacy view also implies that children develop literacy concepts naturally in the home and community as they see print and understand its function in their environment (Hall, 1987). Children use their surroundings to make sense of their world and to interact and communicate with others (Taylor, 1983). Young children continue on the path of literacy development as

they become aware of the associations between print and its use as a means to communicate (Mavrogenes, 1986).

From an emergent literacy perspective preschool children are considered to know a great deal about literacy from early experiences in the home. Researchers have found that many children already understand many concepts about written language even before instruction takes place.

In a longitudinal study of preschool children's early literacy-related competencies, Sonnenscheim, et al. (1996), revealed that the children were able to hold a book properly, turn pages in the right direction, and even tell the story.

The majority of children in the study succeeded on the Environment Print Task in which they were asked to identify products or logos from those products available in their home. This attests to their competence in recognizing print in their environment.

Mavrogenes (1996) points out some of the literacy concepts preschoolers may acquire before formal schooling:

- They make sense out of writing they see in their environment; e.g. McDonalds.
- They expect print to be meaningful and to communicate ideas.

- They may understand directionality, spacing, sequencing, and form.
- They may have some knowledge of letter name, auditory and visual discrimination, and correspondence between written and spoken words (p.43, Burns, Roe and Ross, 1992).

Children's learning begins long before they attend school. In most cases, children spend this early learning period with a parent or caregiver. Therefore, attention to some of the ways children construct knowledge is significant in a study of parent's knowledge of emergent literacy. A parent's understanding of their child's cognitive development as it applies to emergent literacy may affect the way a parent interacts with their child. A brief review of some of the theories in cognitive development that influenced the development of the emergent literacy theory will be discussed.

A highly regarded authority in the area of cognitive development, Piaget (1970, cited in Teale, 1982) argues that a child "builds up" knowledge through interaction with the world. Piaget's theory of cognitive development called constructive structuralism suggests that "intellectual growth is a process of assimilating new experiences with existing mental structures to construct new knowledge" (Teale, 1982).

Piaget's theory lends support to Teale and Sulzby's (1986) research which indicates that the child plays a central role in literacy acquisition as "constructors of his [her] own literacy" (p.729, Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

Also, as pointed out in Mavrogenes (1986) article, Piaget's research in cognitive development also indicates that developmental stages concede to individual differences in each child. These concepts had an influence in the development of the emergent literacy theory. In particular, the idea that children control and manipulate their literacy learning through interactions with their environment.

Some of Vygosky's (1978) work has also had a great influence in the development of some emergent literacy concepts. Vygoskian theory focuses on cognitive development as a process which is culturally and socially based; "and as a communicative process, whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are constructed in culturally-formed settings" (p. 92, Mercer,1994). Taylor (1983) found this theory to support the findings in her study in which she observed several families to determine the influence family and home environment have on literacy development.

A review of some of the research that documents the literacy development of early readers will help to further clarify the concept of emergent literacy and demonstrate the significant

contribution that home environment and parental involvement make on the early literacy development of children.

Durkin's (1966) comprehensive study of early readers provides insight into how children develop literacy. Durkin's (1966) research, which took place over several years, involved children in California and New York who entered first-grade already knowing how to read. It was revealed that the early readers continued to be capable readers throughout the study and that the children's literacy knowledge was greatly effected by what they learned in their home. Durkin (1966) interviewed the parents in order to find out what types of literacy activities were taking place in the home. Several aspects revealed to have significant impact on the children's learning to read.

Every one of the children was read to at home. However, what distinguished the early readers from the non-readers was the great frequency to which they were read. Parents of early readers interacted with their child during story reading. These parents allowed their children to see the text during book reading, and responded positively to their children's questions about the words and pictures.

Durkin (1966) found that the home environment significantly affected the early readers' literacy development. The parents of early readers described themselves as avid readers. This

enjoyment of reading provided a model for the early readers to emulate. The homes of early readers tended to have a literacy rich environment. A variety of reading materials was available, such as newspapers, magazines, and books.

Since Durkin's (1966) study, which laid the groundwork for investigating the relationship of early readers and their home environment, there have been many more studies of early readers.

In Clark's (1976) study, parents of successful readers were examined to see what they had done to influence their child's reading achievement. It was found that all of the parents studied, especially the mothers, were avid readers. The children's desire to read was prompted by the modeling of the parents. Further research conducted by Clark (1984), revealed that parents of precocious readers reported not teaching their child to read, rather they involved their child in activities such as reading and discussing stories, as well as identifying letter names and sounds. Early readers in Clark's (1976) study continued to be quite capable readers and experience with "everyday print" was found to be an important aspect in the children's learning to read, confirming findings in Durkin's (1966) study.

A study to identify differences between early readers and nonreaders from low socioeconomic levels was conducted by Manning

and Manning (1984). Several traits were revealed to be associated with the early readers, such as borrowing books at the library, parents who read for pleasure, and parents who believe they should help them with reading.

Another interesting study that supports the importance of parental involvement in children's early literacy acquisition is supported by another study of early reader. Stroebel and Evans (1988) investigated the possibilities of neurological functioning that might predispose these children to early reading. Prompted by earlier studies linking posterior portions of the language hemisphere with early readers superior scores on tests of visual verbal sequential memory and blending sounds to form words, Stroebel and Evans (1988) assessed the precocious readers by using a larger nueropsychological test battery than the earlier research. A parent survey was also conducted to help "determine aspects of home environments that might interact with nuerological readiness to facilitate early reading" (p.244).

"Although it had been hypothesized that early readers would be superior to controls on tests believed to be sensitive to left posterior hemisphere functioning, the early readers in this study demonstrated superior functioning only on one left front measure and on right hemisphere measures" (p.243). However, results of the parents questionnaire suggested that the early readers were

read to more frequently than nonreaders, demonstrating a common factor found in the lives of precocious readers.

This overview of research on early readers seems to implicate several facets of the home environment as being associated with early reading. They are similar to the four factors Teale (1978) identified as being associated with the environment of early readers. They include the availability of a wide range of printed material, the function of print in their environment, the interactions the child experiences during reading related activities, and meaningful and functional experiences with writing.

There is numerous research concerning the effects of home environment and parental involvement on children's early literacy development that supports Teale's (1978) factors.

One such study, Morrow (1983), described the home and school environment and the behaviors of kindergarten children identified as having a high or low interest in literature. One hundred sixteen children from 21 kindergarten classrooms in both urban and suburban areas were examined in several measures to determine the level of interest in literature.

Results of this study are similar to those reported by Durkin (1966). It was reported that the high interest group had more children's books available to them throughout the home than

did the low interest children. Parents of the high interest group saw reading as a leisure time activity significantly more often than the parents of the low interest group. Furthermore, the high interest group possessed behaviors and came from environments that were consistent with early readers. It was also reported that the high interest children watched fewer hours of television than the low interest readers and had parents who enforced television viewing rules.

Purcell-Gates' (1996) one year descriptive study, investigated the ways in which print is used in the homes of low-income families and the relationship between these uses of print and emergent literacy knowledge held by these homes. In-home observations focusing exclusively on literacy events were conducted in twenty low-income families, which included a total of 24 children.

Results revealed that the families in this study all used print for various purposed as they went about their daily activities. Although there was more reading and writing going on in some homes than others, all families were found to employ phrasal/clausal print as the most type frequently read, such as: reading containers, flyers, coupons, writing grocery list, and signing names.

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Purcell-Gates (1996) inferred that "children who experience many uses of written language to *which they attend and personally experience* have more opportunities to build the important conceptual basis of literacy development - that print is symbolic and serves communicative purposes" (p.426).

There is considerable research describing specific parental practices that are related to reading achievement. Anglum, Beel and Roubinek (1990) studied the relationship between reading achievement and certain social and literacy variables of the home environment. A parent questionnaire, aimed at assessing sixteen variables of the home environment, was sent home with students in grades one through six of one school. Previous years reading achievement scores of the 492 students who participated in the study were compared with results of the parent questionnaire.

It was revealed that of the literacy variables, the strongest relationship and predictors of reading achievement were reading to the child before school entry and the variety of print materials in the home, confirming two of the factors identified in Teale's (1978) review. Those factors being, a literate rich environment and being read to before formal instruction enhances reading development.

One notable study, Flood (1977), demonstrates the importance of interactions during a reading episode. Flood (1977)

investigated the relationship between parental styles of reading to young children and the child's performance on selected prereading related tasks. The families that participated were visited in their homes and asked to read a children's book that was already pre-selected by the researcher. The children participated in several prereading tasks. Fourteen separate components of the parent-child reading episode were selected for analysis, of which six were found to be significantly correlated with the prereading scores.

Flood (1977) concludes that there are four steps during the parent-child reading episode that can produce effective results. They are preparation for reading, children's involvement throughout the reading process, positive reinforcement, post-story evaluative questions.

Hildebrand and Baker (1992) explored parental involvement and children's emerging literacy skills. Parents of children between the ages of 3 and 5½ responded to questionnaires in which results were compared to children's literacy measures. It was found that children with higher emergent literacy had parents who provided artifacts, such as alphabet blocks, books on tape, and flashcards.

An extensive ethnographic study of family literacy by Taylor (1983) provides insight into the dynamics of family life that contributes to literacy development.

Taylor (1983) found that "Literacy was viewed as a "filter" through which the social organization of the everyday lives of the families is accomplished" (P.25). In other words, literacy enabled the families to accomplish essential everyday tasks. Children used print to master their surroundings, build new social connections, and establish new environmental relationships. Taylor (1983) suggests that "literacy develops best in relational contexts which are meaningful to the young child"(p.79).

Taylor (1983) observed that the most significant mode of transmitting literacy styles and values occurs indirectly during use of written language through the life of the family. The direct transmission of literacy occurs less frequently, usually in response to school-related situations.

Attention to language acquisition is appropriate when discussing emergent literacy because it is "an exemplar of how humans construct knowledge" (Weaver, 94, p.66); and it is thought that "language learning is much like literacy learning in that it is an inward individualistic process that acts upon external environmental experiences" (Izkoff, 96)

Some studies of early readers strongly support the connection between language development and literacy development.

Davidson and Snow (1985) studied the social-linguistic experiences of early readers in interaction with their parents and compared them to that of age peers from similar families.

Twelve kindergarten children, six precocious readers and six prereading peers, and their parents participated in the study. The early readers were reading fluently at the third grade level and the prereading peers presented age-appropriate emergent literacy skills. All parents were middle class and educated at least two years beyond secondary school.

The study focused on analyses of elements that describe each speaker's language complexities, conversational devices, and topic, as well as the children's performance on two decontextualized language tasks.

Results of the study revealed that parents of the early readers created an even more enriched language environment for their children than parents of the prereading peers. Compared to the prereaders' parents, early readers' parents requested clarification more often, spoke more about language and the world; initiated more topics about 'other matters', offered more information and guided the child's problem solving more frequently and in a higher proportion, and asked higher level

questions more frequently. According to Davidson and Snow (1995), "These variables all represent sophisticated uses of language in ways that increase knowledge and promote children's decontextualized language skills"(p. 16,). "It has been argued that one prerequisite to high level literacy accomplishment is control over decontextualized oral language - language used with distant or unfamiliar audiences, with whom little background knowledge is shared" (p.19, Davidson and Snow, 1995).

Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992) conducted a similar study investigating the relationship between linguistically precocious children's verbal skills, parent-child interaction patterns, and instructional experiences to their later language and literacy skills. Twenty-five children reported by parents to have begun to talk at an average age of 7.2 months were observed from age 1.8 to 4.6 years.

Their findings indicate that frequency of story reading in the home and child engagement in a story episode at age 24 months were significant predictors of children's language ability at age 2½ and 4½. Interestingly, the precocious talkers were not particularly likely to be precocious readers, however once the early talkers had started to read, their advancement in literacy was remarkably rapid.

In a follow-up study of the same children, Dale, Crain-Thoreson and Robison (1995) revealed that the precocious talkers at age 6.6 were reading at very advanced levels for first graders. Dale et al. (1995) interpret the findings to mean that early stage literacy is not promoted by sophisticated language skills, but later stage literacy is.

In one aspect of Chomsky's (1972) study, the relationship between children's exposure to the written language and the rate of linguistic development was examined. Reading information was gathered through questionnaires from both children and parents and through daily records kept at home of all reading (and listening to books aloud) engaged in by the child over a one-week period.

Results suggest that among the pre-readers, listening to books read aloud is positively related to linguistic stages. Chomsky (1972) found that "Pre-readers in higher linguistic stages are read to by more people and hear more books per week, at higher complexity levels than children at lower linguistic stages."(p. 27).

Snow (1983) draws upon recent research and a case study of a child learning to read and talk to outline the important similarities in the development of both language and literacy. Snow (1983) suggests that there are three parental procedures

that take place during parent-child language interaction: semantic contingency, scaffolding, and accountability. Snow (1983) argues that the characteristics of parent-child interactions that support language acquisition also facilitate early reading and writing development.

In language terms, semantic contingency involves "adults continuing topics introduced by children, adding new information to children's utterances and answering all questions" (p.470, Thomas, 1985). Snow's (1983) case study of one child who was tape recorded at home between the ages of 18 to 36 months demonstrates the similarities between language and literacy interactions Snow suggests exists. Semantic contingency applied to literacy behavior in the case study included: answering questions about letter and number names, questions about words, reading aloud on request, questions about pictures in books, conversation about pictures and text in books, and help with writing requested.

Another study documenting the connection between language and literacy investigated the linguistic and social interactions in the homes of early readers. Thomas (1985) studied thirty early readers and nonearly readers by interviewing their parents about the beginning of their children's' reading, their interaction with other children, and other reading-related

factors. The two groups were matched for IQ scores, socioeconomic status, and age.

All of the early readers in Thomas's (1985) study happened to have a heightened degree to which they used language. The early readers' language was more sophisticated than were their nonearly reading peers. For example, it was observed that the early readers spoke metaphorically and poetically in several of the interviews. The parents of early readers reported that first speech was more than one-word utterances. It was also recorded that the nonearly readers' first speech occurred later than that of the early readers.

Thomas (1985) refers to Snow's (1983) three parental procedures discussed earlier to analyze results found in her study. Thomas (1985) found that, with regard to semantic contingency, all significant others in the lives of each of the early readers provided answers to all of their questions regarding print, pictures and text. The early readers' numerous requests for read aloud sessions were always obliged. Consequently, parents of early readers read to their child more times within a day than parents of nonearly readers. As a result, memorizing a favorite story or book was characteristic in every early reader. Thomas (1985) suggests that this appears to be a very important clue to early reading acquisition.

Thomas (1985) also observed "Scaffolding for early readers consisted of parents structuring dialogue to help the child understand the printed word read to the child" (p.471). For example, parents formulated questions during prereading, during reading, and postreading facilitating the meaning of the printed word. This literacy behavior is consistent with Flood's (1977) earlier findings.

Besides holding early readers accountable for adult speech patterns, the parents of early readers in Thomas's (1985) study held their children accountable for recognizing decontextualized print. For example, in one instance, the word 'exit' was shown on paper to help the child realize the word outside of the contextualized surrounding.

The review of research seems to point to a general agreement among authorities that the experiences a young child has before entering school and the environment in which he/she lives has a strong correlation to reading success or failure. The extent of knowledge that parents have with regard to early childhood literacy development may then determine the literacy environment and literacy activities that take place in their home, which in turn may influence their children's literacy development. Consequently, there have been many studies that investigate parent's knowledge and perceptions of literacy development.

A study by Lancy and Bergin (1992) examined parents' contributions to the emerging reading abilities of kindergarten and first-grade children. It was revealed that parent-child pairs who viewed the child's reading as fun, kept the story flowing by using semantic-oriented rather than decoding-oriented correction tactics, encouraged questions about the story and expressed humor while reading had children who were more fluent and more positive about reading.

Burns and Collins (1987) investigated parent's perceptions of factors affecting the reading development of their intellectually superior children. Mothers responded to a questionnaire designed to assess the home environment with respect to print concepts and a variety of literary experiences. The subjects were 30 four and five year old children, 15 nonreaders and 15 accelerated readers.

Burns and Collins (1987) research generated several important conclusions. The children's superior intelligence and home environment did not automatically result in accelerated reading abilities, instead results showed that the accelerated readers had been provided certain types of experiences to a greater extent than nonreaders, such as linguistic and relational principles. For example, parents made children aware of letter names, letter sounds, letter-sound correspondences, words,

sentences and interacted directly with words/pictures during story reading.

Similar findings by Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham (1991) reveal that it is not only the environment and experiences that facilitate literacy acquisition but also the parents' perceptions of their children's literacy development that contribute to children's reading success.

Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham (1991) believe that "Parental predisposition to cultivate a nurturing environment must be one of the pivotal factors in the creation of such a home setting"(p.192). The parents position in the study, that what you do with available literacy artifacts (e.g. magnetic letters, flashcards, etc.) is more important than just having these things in your home points to an interactive environment, a condition which has been documented to be highly conducive to literacy development.

Another study, Anderson (1994), investigating parents' perceptions of emergent literacy revealed similar findings to that of Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham(1991). Parents in Anderson's (1994) study recognized the importance of adult role modeling of literacy. Most parents' perceptions were revealed to be consistent with an emergent literacy perspective, however, it seemed with further analysis that certain features of emergent

literacy were not as readily accepted. Despite some parents view that learning to read is a holistic process they were still less inclined to reject some traditional views, such as their view that learning to read is a hierarchy of skills.

It is evident, in the research that has been presented, that the current theory of emergent literacy supports the home environment and the experiences provided by the parents of preschool children as positive and vital features of children's literacy development. In light of the significant affects that parents can make on their children's literacy development, the present study has been designed to further investigate parent's perceptions of emerging literacy.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix A

Parent Survey of Home Literacy

These questions have been compiled to learn more about parents' belief of literacy learning and the early writing and reading experiences of preschool children. Scores from your individual questionnaire will not be reported. Instead, they will be compiled with the responses of other parents to learn more about the literacy environment of preschoolers. Therefore, it is imperative that your answers reflect an accurate assessment of the events that actually occur in your home. This questionnaire should be completed by the parent or guardian who is your child's primary care provider.
Please answer the following questions using the scale below.

Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Weekly	Daily
1	2	3	4	5

1. Do you read to your child?	1 2 3 4 5
2. Does your child ask to be read to?	1 2 3 4 5
3. Does your child try to read to you?	1 2 3 4 5
4. Does your child look through books and other printed material?	1 2 3 4 5
5. Does your child pretend to read story books?	1 2 3 4 5
6. Do you visit the public library with your child?	1 2 3 4 5
7. Does your child listen to books on tapes?	1 2 3 4 5
8. Does your child try to tell or write stories?	1 2 3 4 5
9. Do you and your child discuss books that you have read together?	1 2 3 4 5
10. Does your child help to write letters/cards (e.g. thank you notes)	1 2 3 4 5
11. Does your child help open mail (e.g. catalogs, flyers, ads)?	1 2 3 4 5
12. Do you read books, magazines, newspapers at home?	1 2 3 4 5
13. Does your child observe or participate making shopping lists?	1 2 3 4 5
14. Does your child observe/participate writing messages/notes for family members?	1 2 3 4 5
15. Does your child observe/participate following written directions (e.g. directions for assemble, recipe)?	1 2 3 4 5
16. Does your child observe/participate using the TV Guide?	1 2 3 4 5
17. Do you receive or write letters?	1 2 3 4 5
18. Does your child recognize or ask for help to read store signs or read traffic signs?	1 2 3 4 5
19. Does your child write or ask help to write letters/words?	1 2 3 4 5

Please use the scale to answer the experiences listed below

Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently
1	2	3	4

20. I stop reading and point out objects for the child to identify in the pictures	1 2 3 4
21. I stop reading and point out letters in the print	1 2 3 4
22. I stop reading and point out pictures that illustrate what was told in the story	1 2 3 4
23. I stop reading and ask what will happen next?	1 2 3 4
24. I read the entire story as the child listens without many interruptions	1 2 3 4
25. I reread a story or book previously read to my child	1 2 3 4
26. I encourage my child to read with me when the book uses repeated phrases or familiar rhymes.	1 2 3 4
27. My child sits beside me so he/she can see the book	1 2 3 4
28. My child sits across from me so he/she can hear the story	1 2 3 4
29. My child selects the book(s) to be read	1 2 3 4
30. I select the book(s) to be read	1 2 3 4
31. My child holds the book and turns the pages	1 2 3 4
32. I hold the book and turn the pages	1 2 3 4

33. Please check (X) the items that your child has access to use at anytime in your house.

___ paper	___ newspaper
___ pencils	___ typewriter
___ markers	___ indoor/outdoor play gym (slide, swing etc.)
___ pens	___ computer
___ children's books	___ magnetic/block letters
___ magazines	___ comics
___ chalk/writing board	___ stuffed animals
___ musical instruments	___ dictionary
___ crayons	___ flash cards with letters/pictures

34. From the items listed below check (X) *only* the statements in which this type of help has been offered to your child.

A) ___ taught child the ABCs
B) ___ prepared a library corner in child's room
C) ___ placed written labels on objects around the house
D) ___ enforced rules about selecting/limiting TV viewing
E) ___ purchased or borrowed books or magazines for your child
F) ___ provided an area for drawing/writing
G) ___ helped child sound out words
H) ___ taught child the names of some letters
I) ___ taught child the sounds of some letters
J) ___ used flash cards or workbooks to teach names or sounds
K) ___ correct child's attempts at spelling
L) ___ praise child's efforts regardless of how a word is spelled
M) ___ none of the above

35. Check (X) the one item that best describes your feeling about your child learning to read and write

A) I don't worry about it. I believe my child will learn to read when she/he gets to school. So, I will simply read to her/him and not try to teach them to read.

B) I believe it's best to take an active role, and set aside time to teach children about their letter names and sounds, read to them, and purchase school-type workbooks (dot to dot, color by numbers, etc.)

C) I believe my child will learn to read when she/he gets to school. However, I want to help them become aware of written language without directly teaching her/him. I will, therefore, read to them, encourage them to use print by providing them with paper and writing instruments.

36. I believe that reading to children (select only one)
A) will help them to read
B) is not likely to help them to learn to read

37. I believe children's early writing experiences (select only one)
A) will help them learn to read
B) is not likely to help them learn to read

The following information will be used to group data only and are not used for identification purposes. Please circle your response.

My child is a male female

My child's current age is _____ years

My child has ___ older siblings 0 1 2 3 4+

I am a male female

What is your relationship to the child mother father other _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed high school college graduate other _____

I would like to participate in the study and give my permission to use the above information in the study. x _____

Appendix B

Raw Scores for Questions 1-37

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Weekly	Daily
1.			2		22
2.			4		20
3.		1	12	8	3
4.		1	1	6	16
5.		2	3	10	9
6.	1	4	9	10	
7.	5	6	12	1	
8.		1	8	9	6
9.	1		6	8	9
10.	1	2	17	4	
11.	3	4	10	4	3
12.			1	3	20
13.	7	4	6	6	1
14.	3	3	15	3	
15.	3	1	14	6	
16.	12	4	8		
17.		3	16	4	1
18.	1	1	9	10	3
19.	1	1	5	7	10

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently
20.			7	17
21.	2	3	9	10
22.		1	8	15
23.	1	7	10	6
24.	2	12	9	1
25.		1	5	18
26.	2		9	13
27.				24
28.	17	6	1	
29.			1	23
30.	1	8	12	3
31.	1	8	14	1
32.		1	5	18

33. Literacy Artifacts	# of Parents
paper	24
pencil	23
marker	23
pen	20
children's books	24
magazines	19
chalk & board	19
musical instruments	22
crayons	24
newspaper	14
typewriter	5
playgym	22
computer	21
magnetic/block letters	15
comics	2
stuffed animals	24
dictionary	12
flashcards	14

34. Literacy Instruction	# of Parents
A.	18
B.	19
C.	3
D.	18
E.	24
F.	22
G.	22
H.	23
I.	22
J.	13
K.	8
L.	18
M.	0

35.	
A.	00
B.	11
C.	13

36.	
A.	24
B.	00

37.	
A.	24
B.	00

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